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LECTURE ON NIETZSCHE

All these things which I'm going to talk to you about this year are things that I know much less about than usual. That sounds more vain than I meant it to be. But this is a theme in which I have the greatest interest but which I really have studied less adequately than anything else. The reason I have an interest in Nietzsche is that I do think that Nietzsche is one of the very small number of authors who are most important and certainly the modern author who is most important for us – both because of the profundity of his analysis of our situation and because Nietzsche is *us* – the overwhelming influence of Nietzsche on everything in our life. Nietzsche is the most powerful intellectual influence of our times, in ways that everyone is really unaware of; I mean, the degree to which it has penetrated daily life, so that it has come to seem American common sense. So much carried, for example, by German sociology into the United States, words like “lifestyle,” and so on, which are really new words, or just the use of the word “value.” That's all Nietzsche. And so Nietzsche, in a way, is immediately recognizable, but it's so recognizable that it's alien. It's necessary to think through what the use of this Nietzschean language means and what the consequences of Nietzsche are for our life. Somehow, I think, for our own activity of self-consciousness, the study of Nietzsche is central.

Now, you're going to be teaching this to students. It is particularly difficult to teach Nietzsche, and I'm going to talk to you about Nietzsche in large measure from the teaching aspect. I think we'll spend both sessions today on Nietzsche, tomorrow morning on Dostoyevsky and T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, and tomorrow afternoon on [*Antony and*] *Cleopatra*. That is the proper organization. The problem with teaching Nietzsche to American students [is] there are two opposites. In one sense, it doesn't mean a thing to them; they will pay no attention to it. In another, certain kinds of students will go wild about it in a quite dangerous way. Nietzsche's rhetoric – and this of course is one

of the problematic aspects of Nietzsche – is such as to make anybody feel significant and hate the world around them, an easy sense of transcendence, significance, and so on. One of the things that was very striking as a teacher during the 60s, when many students had mental breakdowns – it was a very regular aspect of life; now one doesn't see it as much, and I suppose that perhaps the proportion of psychiatric difficulty remains the same; but there was a kind of evidence of it in the 60s – was the number of students for whom Nietzsche was the material. Practically every student who would come into my office having some kind of paranoid or schizophrenic episode would be citing Nietzsche in one way or another, and it was quite striking.

But the greater difficulties than the psychiatric difficulties haven't been taken seriously; the theme is nihilism, which we're going to discuss today from *The Will to Power*. I just think that the nihilistic experience – perhaps not nihilism in its deepest sense – but the nihilistic experience is really alien to Americans. We're an optimistic people. This year I taught a course at Chicago; Saul Bellow and I teach a literature course, and we had to do nihilism in modern literature. One of the books we read was Ferdinand Céline's *Journey to the End of the Night*. The students, who of course claimed that they had all the nihilistic experiences after reading the first part of Nietzsche, were just appalled by it and bored by it. It might be valuable to try to stick the Céline book into one of your courses just to see what the reaction is. Sometimes you ought to put books in to test the intellectual temperature of your students. It was a combination of – it seemed intensely boring and also horrible. Of course, the fact that Céline became a Nazi – or if not really a Nazi, certainly some kind of nihilist who could sympathize with the extremes of fascism – that was always a cloud for them, a kind of combination of moralism plus “Why can't you have more loving relations?” If you've read *Journey to the End of the Night*, the hero is a man named Robinson who is willing to die, to let his girlfriend shoot him, because he refuses to say he loves her. He just wouldn't take that. The key was to subject himself to that. Of course, this is an object of admiration for Céline, the narrator, who felt that this man really believed in something that wasn't worth dying for; he would have said that he loved her. I believe that the Céline books are the only, or among the only – I don't know that literature very well – plausible characterizations of the nihilistic mood in literature. When you read somebody like Gide, that's just show-off; he just shows how shocking he can be to *épater le bourgeois*; he's obviously still very excited by life and by fame and so on, and, well, by a few other things. With somebody like T. S. Eliot, it's just an excuse for a certain kind of snobbism. In higher people, it's a kind of despair based upon great longings for old, grand cultures. But in Céline, the experience that it is really all over, which is supposed to be the essence of the nihilist experiences, is there. And the students simply didn't go with it. Whereas in France, young people, I think, understand it, immediately recognize its greatness, and so on.

I attributed this to the real American belief in happiness, in the right to happiness, that things will work out, and that all this high intellectual criticism that comes from Europe is simply a way to make our life better. Woody Allen claims that he saw a book in a bookstore, *The Categorical Imperative and Six Ways to Make It Work for You*. That's an American. It's in some sense nihilism – for the greater fulfillment of your life. Self-help books of that kind. It is extremely alien, but at the same time there is no doubt that the

teaching itself has enormous effects on America, on the one hand, and at the same time, it is descriptive of something that's going on in the souls of Americans, in American young people, but without a *prise de conscience*, without their being fully conscious of it. It is quite extraordinary that the language of Nietzsche – it's always been a wonder to me – has had this enormous success in America, much more so perhaps than any place in the world, or at least we were the first. Here you took America, which was simple common sense, positivistic, and all of that world, beginning with values, lifestyle, charisma – which wasn't Nietzsche's term but which Weber developed around certain Nietzschean ideas – you can't find a janitor in America who doesn't use the word charisma now.

No doubt that really is quite astounding, when you think of all that that word carries with it. It implies that leadership comes from something like divine grace, but which really isn't divine. The undemocratic implications of that! Of course, the whole terminology was developed to say that the democratic rationalistic legitimacy doesn't work and therefore the critical thing to concentrate on is something like charisma, which we, of course, immediately degrade into public relations. But, in a way we get the central idea by turning it into mere public relations, or an act, or something like that. Anybody who yells loud enough is said to be charismatic. In a way, we continue the democratic revolution or the democratic progress, which Nietzsche was trying to stop, but at the same time, we undermine its vital spiritual intellectual core – am I being clear in that? – because the meaning of democracy was that men rationally could subject themselves to laws that they make themselves with rulers who are themselves reasonable, a union of reason. And of course, this whole language denies that.

You see it in the word “lifestyle” – again, a Weberian notion which came from Nietzsche – that the good way of life is not what one seeks because they're working back, and there is no such thing as the good way of life. There is no intellectual intuition of the ends of man. There are artistic makings of life. Now, of course, anybody has a lifestyle. I don't have to go through the different varieties; there are as many as there are quirks and perversions of people. But again, the crucial point is gotten that the philosophical rational quest for the right way to live is not necessary. But what it is, is a kind of expression of the artistic forming of the unconscious drives. I am still so astounded by the degree of success of this dark German side of the soul, which was as alien as anything could be to American directness, and empiricism, common sense – how it captured America. Now, it had to respond to something in our souls, and it's really worth reflecting on. I was with a taxi driver in Atlanta, I was driving in his cab, and he told me that he had just gotten out of prison, and he had gotten in contact with himself – again, that language of the self, which is essentially Nietzschean in character. He got in contact with himself, and he'd done all kinds of therapy. I said, “Well, what kind of therapy did you do?” And he said, “Well, I did depth psychology and transactional analysis, but what I liked best of all was gestalt.” If you think about what that means – the high expressions of German philosophy now in the same way that one has a suppository.

In some sense, you can say, well, it's part of our genius for incorporating everything and making it democratic, and that's kind of nice, you know, personality, creativity, commitment, all these things which were meant to be aristocratic notions. Very few people could really be creative. Very few people could really have personalities, people

who could set their own values – those were the activities of genius. In a way, that's what Nietzsche is trying to restore as over against, on the one hand, democratic mediocrity, but also against rationalism. Those things become available for everybody. That's marvelously American. But at the same time, the degree to which it alienates both from common sense, the simple democratic character of our lives, which was supposed to be work and family, and taking care of the country in ourselves. Somehow the opening up of an enormous dark region of the soul but opening it up without any assurance that there is a great continent there or that the great continent will not do terrible damage. It's that easygoing, happy ... Nihilism for Americans would be connected with the right to happiness, as I suggested. That shatters the whole mood of nihilism. And it is a mood. It's supposed to be a temper of the soul. You can say that there can be no happiness, but what they do is they take the despair and then say, "We'll cure it by a therapy." That mixture, it's very, very odd. It's very central to Americans. In one sense, this is the world described by Nietzsche that was going to come. But it's also a world which has been transformed by Nietzsche and that's the reason why Nietzsche is both important, interesting for us to watch in its effect on us, but also dangerous.

I'm going to begin by reading, just reading over a passage of Nietzsche's that is not from *this* book. I don't know why you chose *The Will to Power* because it's really not a book. You're going to have some considerable problems. You're going to have to go through and just pick out the aphorisms. Nietzsche, from the very beginning, in all his writings, is extremely difficult, elusive, somehow expecting a certain kind of cultivation on the part of his readers, which we no longer have and which he doesn't point to. It's not like the problem of Kant. Kant is difficult to read, but he tells you what his sources are, and he in a way speaks to universal reason. Although perhaps to understand the real meaning of Kant you have to know a whole world – there is a meaning that is simply the universal meaning conveyed by reason. But Nietzsche is so much appealing to a common experience, which at the same time he's trying to preserve. You can say that that experience – and I think that that has to be pointed out to the students – is the experience, on the one hand, of classical antiquity and, on the other, the experience of the biblical religions. Judaism and particularly, of course, Christianity. He implies a deep knowledge of, a deep sympathy with, but also a struggle against those two roots, and both have had a tendency to disappear.

In a way, we've solved the problem of the tension. Nietzsche describes our soul as a kind of bow with two ends which are very difficult to string. But the string has an enormous tautness, and it is out of that bow that one will project the new values that he hopes and expects that man will be able to set for himself. Of course, part of the American educational way has been to unbend the bow again, to use a Nietzschean expression, by just not giving us that information any longer. In a private way, I'd like to hear from some of you about this. I, as a teacher, over the years, always when I began teaching, I said, "Well, Americans don't know anything." I didn't know anything when I was eighteen. When you begin *tabula rasa*, that's a wonderful thing. But I didn't realize how much they had in them just sort of instinctively, from their own religious trainings, certain kinds of family relations. My feeling has been that this has been going down year by year, so that there is almost no bow whatsoever to begin with or that the soil is very thin, that this has been the problem of education, that the past longings ... Let me say in this context: one of

the things that's very striking is that I'm finding that a disproportionate number of good students now are Catholic, or at least of Catholic training, because they seem to carry more of the past. I mean, frequently, just the mere reminder that a bad conscience breaks, it can be a stimulus to serious education.

But *The Will to Power* is a very great problem because of the difficulty of Nietzsche's writing in general, and here it's not a completed book. It's very hard for the teacher himself to figure out; what he can say is really serious, developed, what the real intentions of the book are, and so on. First, there are many wonderful, wonderful things. Wonderful observations. But again, this is a problem because the most wonderful observations of Nietzsche's are psychological observations – psychological in the broadest sense, the possible states of soul. He is marvelous in describing, characterizing, the phenomena that go on. Young people, and particularly our young people, don't tend to be very subtle analysts of their experiences, their moods. They're told what they feel. They have the categories given to them. In large measure, someone has to turn them to it. But I wanted to begin with the famous passage – and it might be useful for you as teachers to do so – the last-man passage from *Zarathustra*, because in some sense it states the beginning point.

Perhaps I should say the following. I had meant to say this in my remarks, that I think part of the success of Nietzsche in the United States has come from his assimilation into Marxism, the great movement. Nietzsche is clearly a right-winger, if you'll forgive that crude formulation, but it is important to recognize that because Nietzsche is so elusive that one has to stick on things that are really clear and which they will understand. We'll come back to this. But he's against democracy, he's against notions of human rights, above all – and perhaps this would be allowed, for some of the best discussion in class, if by the best one means the most heated – he is *absolutely* against the equality of women, feminism. He regards that as *absolutely* essential. I'll try to explain why, and there's going to be much in here that one can refer to. Nietzsche is a figure who said modernity – and modernity means democracy and ultimately socialism – is, on the one hand, the decadence of man, necessarily the decadence of man, and leads to – or not really leads to but is the true expression of – nihilism, the belief in nothing, and that it is the deepest and perhaps fatal misunderstanding of the nature of things and hence particularly of man, and it is one of the great achievements of the left to have incorporated Nietzsche. Because if you hear Nietzschean talk, I think you'll see that it's mostly on the left today. That's been since the Second World War. The whole school of criticism called deconstructionism is nothing but that. Deconstructionism, in the simplest sense, it's a circus act – you cut the woman up into pieces, the magician, and then you put her back together. That's what they do to Nietzsche. They cut him up and put him back together, and he's a leftist, after the circus act.

I think the simplest way in which Nietzsche moved to the left: Nietzsche's description of modern man, which is very impressive, can easily be assimilated to Marx's understanding of the bourgeois. It's much profounder, obviously. We can say, "Well, Nietzsche says this is the last man, this is what we are heading to." Marx says, "No, this is a stage, we're going to get beyond it after the revolution," and this has allowed the left at least to make a plausible case because this is a description of the man of our times and that's the bourgeoisie. That's what we have to get rid of. And that would much more easily allow for the revolution, precisely because Nietzsche is a much profounder describer,

spectator, of man than Marx and takes much more seriously the intimate experiences, which somehow the economic explanation does not. Without the Nietzschean element, I think that Marxism would have died completely. The appeal of contemporary Marxism is the appeal of Nietzsche. You'll find that in the Frankfurt school – Habermas and so on, it began really with Lukács and so on, a long time ago, it's been a continuous thing – that these people were smart enough to recognize where the real intellectual force was and somehow to incorporate it. I'm not saying that it was a propaganda stunt. I think they were convinced – Marxists who didn't want to think it through. But Nietzsche posed great problems, and they somehow took that in. And I think, of course, that has a great deal to do ... The refugees from Hitler, the Frankfurt school, spent a long time in the United States, 20 to 25 years, and they were extremely effective. But, for example, the kind of charm of Marcuse, if there is any charm, is precisely that: a Marxist analysis of the present, a Nietzschean hope for the future after the revolution. Nietzsche somewhat banalized and vulgarized into Freudianism.

Another way of speaking of the power of Nietzsche in the democratic world is that he allows for excitement. A plaything of the democratic world. It would be so boring if there weren't these kinds of expectations, so in a way he becomes the opiate of the democratic man, if one likes. This was in a way Nietzsche's objection to Romanticism. Romanticism was in a way a very splendid thing with very great men who had opposed mediocrity and materialism in the name of art. But very soon, as those of you who know *Madame Bovary* know, a man like Monsieur Homais, who is the bourgeois, quintessentially uses the Bohemians and will have their paintings and read their poetry and so on after dinner. In a way, Nietzsche suffers some of the same fate. He, in a way, gives the needed supplement to a certain lack.

By the way, I would very much appreciate – since my presentation is both very incomplete and halting and because I would like your notions, and I know that there are people here who know Nietzsche much better than I do, for example Ernest – I would appreciate your just interrupting me to ask questions or to state your opinions about this. But the last man is a very good beginning point. The Zarathustra who has come down from his mountain among men finds that he can't attract them by descriptions of the superman, and he says, "Well alright, now I'm going to disgust them." His educational technique in describing the last man is to describe a human being who is absolutely revolting and to arouse their contempt. Now, that human being ultimately is supposed to be a mirror in which they see themselves and have self-contempt. But in some sense, we can repeat that activity in reading this to them:

They have something of which they are proud. What do they call that which makes them proud? Education they call it; it distinguishes them from goatherds. That is why they do not like to hear the word "contempt" applied to them. Let me then address their pride. Let me speak to them of what is most contemptible: but that is the *last man*.¹

¹ F. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. W. Kaufmann (New York: Viking Press, 1954), 128-29.

Here his beginning point is of course modern education. He doesn't mean to say modern education as criticized by the Reagan administration. But modern education as it was known in Germany, which was very much an admired thing. Modern scholarship. Modern academic philosophy. History, natural science, and so on. *Bildung*. The bourgeois education as it was represented in the high period of the German university.

The time has come for man to set himself a goal. The time has come for man to plant the seed of his highest hope. His soil is still rich enough. But one day this soil will be poor and domesticated, and no tall tree will be able to grow into it. Alas, the time is coming when man will no longer shoot the arrow of his longing beyond man, and the string of his bow will have forgotten how to whirl!²

Incidentally, I wonder what students will get from that. Do you think it will mean *anything* to them? I think one must give some kind of explanations in this context. I mean, behind it, of course, lying behind all of this is the simple but powerful Nietzschean formulation "God is dead." God is what caused men to do extraordinary deeds in the past, and therefore without God man will have no goal of aspiration. The purpose of any serious thought according to Nietzsche is to re-establish goals, which means to say, something which men can respect, esteem, value, and that of course is the beginning of the understanding that "good and bad," that formulation, should be replaced by "value," the notion that a value is something that's valuable, something that we esteem.

What has happened is that we have lost the objects of esteem. It's worthwhile asking students what they esteem these days. They all say that they esteem something, and I think in general you'll find that they esteem being open, which means to say, having no esteem. They esteem open people, or they esteem certain kinds of very abstract notions. Nietzsche puts it in *The Will to Power* that morality has become abstract: people who have really nothing to do with their lives. Ghandi would be a perfect example of abstract moralism as opposed to, say, an Athenian's attachment to Pericles or an American's to George Washington at the time of the Revolution or immediately afterward. With the students, I always say these things just to get reactions from them. One can say, "What's wrong with my not having any heroes? As a matter of fact, I do have heroes. What's wrong with Mick Jagger's being my hero?" And he said, "That's not so bad – because you see they are still moralistic – I also have other heroes." And I said, "Well, who?" "Jessie Jackson and Cardinal Bernardin." And I said, "Well, they're all three on the same level." That is no way to denigrate the cardinal – or Jessie Jackson either. But they are largely, like Mick Jagger, media creations. I mean, this kid had never heard of Cardinal Bernardin before the Nuclear Freeze movement three months before, and the Nuclear Freeze movement had that same character of abstract moralism. And why are they for the Nuclear Freeze movement? So we can have peace, and then we can have absolute freedom to do whatever we want. I think that's the inner content.

² Ibid., 129.

Nietzsche says here, “I say unto you: one must still have chaos” (a very important formula) “in oneself to be able to give birth to a dancing star. I say unto you: you still have chaos in yourselves.”³ Now this formula – of course, as always with Nietzsche, it’s very important – is atheist. His observation of modernity is that men no longer really believe; that’s his assertion, it’s finished. Now, whether that is simply true is another question, but that is the beginning assertion, the beginning observation. Therefore, the difference between Nietzschean atheism, as you know very well, and, say, Marxist atheism is that Nietzschean atheism is characterized by longing for God. You can say religiosity without religion. Or you know the formula, very simply, “God is dead,” meaning to say that once He existed, meaning to say that the belief was compelling enough that men could believe in it, that God was once compelling and that made life possible.

The loss of God is catastrophic from Nietzsche’s point of view – in the characterization here, *chaos*. Of course, what he does is he puts into man what we know from the Bible. If God was to be creative, create the universe out of nothing, it was obviously out of a chaos, otherwise God was not free. Nietzsche argues that for man to be creative, if the word is to mean anything, there must be chaos. And chaos means to say that which is not guided or organized by any rational principles. One can get no light from reason. In some sense, it is this chaos that Nietzsche is trying to cultivate. Now, one has to recognize that the notion of creativity as being a good thing, everybody has accepted; the notion that chaos is a good thing, people have not accepted. But the question is whether the two are not necessarily connected. What chaos means *is* violence, brutality. Chaos means no principle of peace. Reason means the possibility of peace, ordering, at least in principle. Nietzsche argues that creativity and growth means the same – war among men, subordination, enslavement, rebellion, overcoming – that the underlying experience of man, man who really faces his situation and the man who is going to be creative, is in the first place chaos.

He said, “You still have chaos in your soul.” The implication is that the tendency of modernity has been to take away the chaos. Well, why shouldn’t one take away chaos? Well, his argument is that it is not really taking away. It is a superficial covering over of the fundamental situation, a kind of hopefulness, but a low hopefulness. The notion “the will to power” is just another expression for chaos, an active chaos, as opposed to lying flat and doing nothing. The whole notion of the unconscious, which Nietzsche did not invent but to which he gave a new meaning, was the source of the chaos. The unconscious as opposed to the conscious. If your students know Descartes, the rational consciousness of the modern scientific method is merely a little island, or a boat, floating on the unconscious. The whole notion is meant to be a correction of Descartes. Of course, the absurdity of what came immediately after, which again was a democratic understanding: Yes, we do have this chaos, we have the unconscious, everybody agrees that there is such a thing as an unconscious now – when I was a kid, or when some of you were kids, that was a very controversial thing; now it’s absolutely certain – but at the same time we think that science can understand the unconscious. You see how absurd that is. If the unconscious is really chaos, then science cannot possibly grasp it. The difficulty with that is that it is, even from

³ Ibid.

a Nietzschean point of view, much worse than people who don't believe in the unconscious because the unconscious is the source of violent creative experiences, great longings. If it can really be exhausted by reason, then reason itself would take on a ragged and irrational air, but at the same time, that world would be tamed, it could be subject to order.

Nietzsche here is speaking in the name of chaos.

Alas, the time is coming when man will no longer give birth to a star. Alas, the time of the most despicable man is coming, he that is no longer able to despise himself. Behold, I show you the *last man*.

"What is love? What is creation? What is longing? What is a star?" thus asks the last man, and he blinks.⁴

I don't know whether you've noticed this. Students never use the word "love" anymore. I mean they'll use "brotherly love" or something like that. But "love" for what they now call "interpersonal relations." It simply is not used. And it's a striking ... They have a good relationship, but what does love mean? A very dangerous abandon. A particular form of possession, a desire to be possessive. Hence it's connected with the possibilities of jealousy, anger, all of those distorting phenomena which become particularly problematic within feminism or in the relations taking place in the dispensation of feminism. That would not have been a surprise to Nietzsche because Nietzsche would take, with that which is understood to be the struggle and the fullness of, to use the Nietzschean language, commitment. See, commitment is another Nietzschean word. The crucial thing is what you put into it, not so much what it is. The objective content of the answer is gone, but it is the attachment to the thing that counts. Of course, that word has become democratized, too; "I've made a commitment to my girlfriend for at least two years." But the language is there, and commitment means precisely irrational total dedication, idealization, and so on. Nietzsche took the sexual revolution, which he saw very clearly coming, and feminism as a mode, not of serious expression of formerly repressed passions, but as a way of domesticating, taming the erotic passions, which used to be, when you read Plato, connected with madness, all kinds of dangerous activities, and so on. Or if you read romantic novels, the heroes are losing not only all their money but their lives, their reputations, and so on – enormous risk. Sexual liberation makes it possible not to have those risks or, to use contemporary language, when they talk about coming out of the closet with various things, the notion is that they have some kind of enormous tiger or lion roaring in there, sort of swelling the door, and then you open up and a little tiny mouse walks out, fairly easily satisfied. I think anybody who looks at the student generation today – this is certainly not Dionysus. I think they're said to be merely resentful, but they certainly have satisfactions of what was previously denied. The tremendous importance of longing in Nietzsche – love, longing.

Now, Nietzsche begins with a critique of longing. You'll see this in the various remarks he makes about Romanticism. But what was wrong with the Romantics? Not that

⁴ Ibid.

they preferred longing to any of the satisfactions that were available. It was that ultimately they were too passive; they didn't recognize that man could create the objects of longing. But we will come back to that. The possibility of self-contempt and the experience of longing – those are the two things which are most lacking. This entire description of the last man is a description, a mere factual description. A very impressive one, a very powerful one. But it is against the background of these facts that one recognizes that there must be something wrong with these facts themselves. After Nietzsche, the distinction between facts and values arose. The distinction between facts and values was based in part on Nietzsche's articulation that values are the most important thing. But Nietzsche says (he didn't live to see it) that obviously, even those who made the fact-value distinction recognized that values are what guide life, and if you have made it impossible to have values, if values have become undermined, and the instrument that creates values has been undermined, then you can factually say that man is no longer man, that the ambience in which man lives has been polluted or destroyed.

“What is love?” “What is creation?” “What is longing?” [...] The earth has become small, and on it hops the last man, who makes everything small. His race is as ineradicable as the flea-beetle; the last man lives longest. “We have invented happiness,” say the last men, and they blink. They have left the regions where it was hard to live, for one needs warmth.⁵

For example, they moved from Chicago to Santa Fe. “One still loves one's neighbor and rubs against him, for one needs warmth.”⁶ He's thinking about the Christian experience. Now, Nietzsche says elsewhere that to love one's neighbor was an incredibly difficult self-discipline in the history of the soul. Because one's neighbor is disgusting and unattractive. That's what it meant, that one's neighbor was a being to despise; not only an enemy, but something to be hated. And now, we have succeeded in so taming the soul that that's no longer a commandment that's necessary. It's what people long for, to have harmless people to be around. I think that was the genius of Woodstock. You remember years ago, that's a great achievement; you didn't need the police or anything, and there was a great burst of love. One is constantly looking for that in group experiences.

“Becoming sick and harboring suspicion are sinful to them: one proceeds carefully.”⁷ Have you heard the expression? Again, this is another one of these things my taxi driver out to the airport coming in was saying. “Well, we're all beginning to get paranoid. Yeah.” Now that's *the* thing, “paranoid.” What does Nietzsche say? Paranoia is clearly a disease. You shouldn't be paranoid. Is the opposite of paranoid “laid back”? “Becoming sick and harboring suspicion.” In a way, it's Nietzsche's whole understanding because men do not fit together naturally. Suspicion. But it becomes a disease. “A fool, whoever still stumbles over stones or human beings! A little poison now and then: that

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

makes for agreeable dreams. And much poison in the end, for an agreeable death.”⁸ He’s talking about modern medicine. “One still works, for work is a form of entertainment. But one is careful lest the entertainment be too harrowing.”⁹ You constantly see that; of course, I have my work, my hobbies. “One no longer becomes poor or rich: both require too much exertion. Who still wants to rule? Who obey? Both require too much exertion. No shepherd and one herd! Everybody wants the same, everybody is the same: whoever feels different goes voluntarily into a madhouse.”¹⁰ Psychiatry, which is absolutely universal.

“‘Formerly, all the world was mad,’ say the most refined, and they blink.”¹¹ What does that mean? Who says all the world was mad? Well, I think everybody does say all the world was mad. We’ve all read history, world history. And were all past ages mad? There were slaves. There were kings. And I don’t think there’s a single student who reads the history of England, the history of Greece, who doesn’t say that that was crazy. They say, oh, that’s wonderful. You’ve got to know history, you’ve got to be open to things, and so on. But they’re not open to those things because they know that was crazy. The latest transformation of the way we read history is as a history of the enslavement of women, which means to say that it was all crazy up to now. I talked to a young theologian; he says that that’s what they teach even in Catholic seminaries, that it was a cultural error, the role of women within the church. That means to say our historical knowledge is really a history which ends up praising ourselves, how much wiser we are, how we have seen through the errors of the past. Connected with that self-praise – the whole historical movement has culminated in this awareness – is the most contemptible human being. Hegel already knew this danger of history, of the historical mood, when he said that every German gymnasium professor teaches that Alexander the Great conquered the world because he had a pathological level of power. The proof that the teacher does not have a pathological love of power is that he has not conquered the world.

We have set up standards of normalcy, while speaking of cultural relativism. But there is no question that we think we understand what cultures are and the kind of mistakes they make. We are all in favor of having many different cultures. But all those cultures must *really* do the same things we want. Nietzsche says, of course, you have to have cultures. That’s a Nietzschean contribution, and a tremendous amount of anthropology has been based on Nietzsche, and so on. But he just says, in order to have really different cultures, you have to have in some places slaves, harems; that’s part of it. Everybody was, in a way, in favor of the Ayatollah; not everybody, but a tremendous number of Americans were in favor of the Ayatollah before he came to power; then they’re just furious at what he’s doing to women. But that’s a culture. It’s really different. There was more cultural difference, real cultural difference, in the United States when I was a child than there is in the whole Western world today. When there was segregation in the South, I remember, they were like from a different world, and that wasn’t even slavery. We’ve lost sense of the meaning or the possibility of real differences. It’s either something we’re for in a sentimental way

⁸ Ibid., 129-30.

⁹ Ibid., 130.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

as culture or that we become horrified by. It is really very interesting; the Iran situation is one of those things where our intellectual incoherence ... That intellectual incoherence is the sign, the symptom of nihilism, according to Nietzsche. They were against the Shah for two reasons: one, because he was a tyrant; the other, because he was too universal, too Westernizing; he was trying to impose Western things. Then, some people were for the Ayatollah, and the Ayatollah is culture; that really is a representative of the old Iranian or Muslim culture. But at the same time, he's denying human rights, which means to say the Ayatollah has no right to have a culture because cultural difference –precisely true cultural difference, rather than eating egg foo young or corned beef, [which are] merely residual effects ...

Real culture means difference precisely about what the rights of man are. Nietzsche says here, there are no rights which men have not conquered. Nietzsche is absolutely marvelous, in terms of teaching, for getting students, on the one hand, to recognize that they believe in Nietzsche and, at the same time, to be absolutely shocked by Nietzsche because he's against what they believe in. There's not one who doesn't believe in creativity and in the dullness and the drabness of modern life, who doesn't believe in culture and rootedness, who doesn't think it's important to be committed and have values – and at the same time, they're all universal scientific democrats. It's a profound incoherence, which is to any outside observer something that is a pathology because it means to say that there's nothing really serious in terms of arranging one's priorities, which again would be a Nietzschean formulation, a way of doing things. Arranging one's priorities is absolutely impossible.

All you have to do is look. Nietzsche talks about this, and we see it again expressed in our times: the fantastic tension, although, I think, unrecognized, between ecology and – well, I'm going to say it directly – aspects of feminism. Because if nature is good, we shouldn't touch it, and then we have to produce drugs to control birth, and that's an improvement, a freedom. It's on the one hand a subordination, we assume that nature is good, and on the other, man's freedom from nature. And the two people, the two groups, belong to the same political party. Actually, they tend to go together, feminism and ecology are very frequently linked, but my impression is that in terms of the convictions underlying them they are contradictory.

“One is clever and knows everything that has ever happened: so there's no end of derision. One still quarrels, but one is soon reconciled – else it might spoil the digestion.”¹² There can't be quarrels, at least from our point of view, which lead to serious war. Another, similar incoherence: peace everywhere, and the same people in favor of wars of national liberation. It's not merely that we're in favor of wars so there won't have to be any wars. We also have a deep admiration for people who are committed enough to die for something, but we don't have any reason to do it. “One has one's little pleasure for the day and one's little pleasure for the night.”¹³ Reading and sex. “But one has a regard for health. ‘We have

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

invented happiness,' say the last men, and they blink."¹⁴ And the crowd shouts, "Give us this last man, O Zarathustra."¹⁵

Now, very, very much, the whole of Nietzschean thought can in a way or at least in very large measure be drawn from this passage. But it's the center of it, this idea. I don't want to debase the meaning of this. But somehow the goal of the welfare state is what he meant by last man, not the welfare state as it is, but the goal of the welfare state. It's Sweden improved, which has attracted the admiration of certain kinds of people for a long time. Nietzsche wants to begin with the horror of this. Now you can say this is too low, it's merely political and so on. But for Nietzsche, the world is one, and then what man is, and this is particularly true for Nietzsche more so than for earlier philosophy, in his political situation is a reflection, is the beginning of where we have to begin in order to understand what being is, and our particular problem comes from this particular pathology. In some sense, a political observation is the ground for the new philosophy, and a political transformation is the ground for the health of man and for the preservation of the human, as well as for the enhancement of man's highest activity, which is philosophy.

Nietzsche is on the right. He's not a conservative by any manner of means, that's perfectly clear. He's not a capitalist; he prefers war. You see, when one reads Nietzsche from one particular party, if one is a leftist, one can find things about the distorting character of our society which are very appealing. If one is a rightist, one can find things against democratic egalitarianism which are very appealing. If one is in favor of classical philosophy, one can see that he recognizes the importance of community, order of rank, the aristocracy of the soul, and so on. But he is none of those things. In a way, he touches all the bases. He's not a classic. He's different from the classics in that he is anti-speculative, which was the central aspect of classical philosophy. He's not a rightist, in any sense, or in the ordinary sense of the word, because he's a profound revolutionary. He's obviously not a leftist, because he sees the principles of the left as merely the extension of the principles which some people are trying to conserve in conservatism. It's an attempt at a new beginning, which is a transformation of the soul of man, as well as of his politics, but that requires, follows from, this observation.

In some sense, if you can't get your students to take this observation seriously, you can't get them to take Nietzsche seriously. Otherwise, they'll just be speaking words, if they don't feel somehow that this is an object of contempt and that they are somehow like this. They wouldn't be normal in any way if they weren't somehow like this because this is certainly the elements of our time and what is most valued. Now, one can easily say to Nietzsche, these things are values. And that's, of course, what he says: modern science is really just a value. Modern politics is just another value. But they are values that don't take seriously what it means to be a value, so they aren't values that will work to hold a society together. Another passage from Nietzsche. Perhaps I ought to say simply what nihilism is and then I'll read the passage. Simply that here is nothing to esteem, nothing that compels us. We have seen through it all. Of course, there were a lot of socialists who

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

hoped for a better world; there were people who believed in democracy. What he said is that those were all weak beliefs. He claimed that the scientists themselves – we'll read through some of that later – everything in our life reflected a self-irony. There were some people, he says, who in some sense faced the issue. You found this in philosophers like Schopenhauer. Pessimism. You found it in writers like Baudelaire, Flaubert. That it's all over. Nothing, no human activity, has a support or ground. Everything is necessarily illusion, but illusions which cannot work any longer. They once worked. This was the great expectation of Romanticism. Rousseau's contribution. Of course, there were illusions, artistic, creative illusions. That's what the past was, and we can have new ones. That's what Beethoven, Schiller, that's what Goethe ... But in the generation immediately succeeding – that if those are merely illusions, they will be sucked back into the ugly reality.

Nihilism is that experience of groundlessness expressed in the formula: one can't believe in gods any longer, and once there are no longer gods, there's nothing else, but that the scientists themselves don't really believe in sciences and understanding of the world. On the other hand, there is another sense of nihilism. There are, in a way, three kinds of nihilism. There's Nietzsche's own nihilism, which is a positive life-enhancing response to the other form of nihilism, one can say to the despair of nihilism, but the other sense is an anarchy of values. Not that there are no values, but an anarchy, which means to say that none of them can work in the forming of a life.

By the way, another terminology which comes from Nietzsche is role playing. Modern men are actors. Now this is just taken for granted. Everybody speaks of his roles. It's another terminology and another language of sociology that has succeeded. The greatest, you can say, genealogy, or theogony, of Nietzsche's thought in the United States is that Nietzsche, Max Weber, and a few others are brought to succeeding schools of sociologists and then brought to the United States and spread by sociology departments. And what does it mean to say if you've got a role: role as a woman, role as a man, role as a teacher, role as a citizen? You're an actor, you put on a costume, and you yourself *know* that that's only a role, and roles can be changed. The real man, according to Nietzsche, recognizes that if he has roles, if they're only roles, then they're not worth it. They're not real. And so on. Either the insight that it's nihilistic despair about it or a man who really can be what he is and unify all the aspects of his life, that was what was meant by the notion of personality, which was introduced by Kant and so on fifty years before Nietzsche. Nietzsche concentrated on the artistic character. He claims that all men today have a certain kind of irony, which they try to escape, they try to cover over; the deeper men see it, and the irony is caused by this – I mean, the anarchy of values.

This is a list of opposite values most men hold today. "We call good someone who does his heart's bidding, but also the one who only tends to his duty."¹⁶ There are two kinds of people: those who live their lives freely and self-expressively, and those who always subordinate themselves, the Kantian moralist. "We call good the meek and the reconciled, but also the courageous, unbending, severe."¹⁷ You have to look into yourself in each case.

¹⁶ Bloom is referring to "unpublished material composed during the period of *The Gay Science*, 1881-1882" cited by Heidegger in the English translation by David Farrell Krell of Heidegger's *Nietzsche I-II* (San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row, 1979 and 1984), 157.

¹⁷ Ibid.

I think we recognize the charm of both sides. “We call good someone who employs no force against himself, but also the heroes of self-overcoming; we call good the utterly loyal friend of the true, but also the man of piety, one who transfigures things.”¹⁸ I think each of us could find moments when we are on both sides. The scientist who would investigate anything, but then somehow the atmosphere of the true believer. Each has its charm.

We call good those who are obedient to themselves, but also the pious;
we call good those who are noble and exalted, but also those who do not despise and condescend;
we call good those of joyful spirit, the peaceable, but also those desirous of battle and victory;
we call good those who always want to be first, but also those who do not want to take precedence over anyone in any respect.¹⁹

That’s a fair list, I think, of something that operates today, and if you look at them, you’ll see that they are just Jerusalem and Athens. I mean to say, one is Greek and the other is Christian. We call good someone who does his heart’s bidding, that’s somehow Greek, but also the one who tends to his duty, that’s more Christian. We call good the meek and the reconciled, that’s Christian, but also the courageous, unbending, severe, that’s Greek. We call good someone who employs no force against himself, but also the heroes of self-overcoming. A little more complicated. We call good the loyal friend of the true, but also the man of piety, and so on. I think the second understanding of nihilism is more revealing. Not to say that the two are not obviously connected, but it is more revealing of the way we actually experience nihilism that we have a medley of values and none of them can be said to be the highest.

I just took this out of the Heidegger volume, it’s from some unpublished ...²⁰

There is no longer any goal in and through which all the forces of the historical existence of peoples can cohere and in the direction of which they can develop; no goal of such a kind, which means at the same time and above all else no goal of such power that it can by virtue of its power conduct Dasein to its realm in a unified way and bring it to creative evolution. By establishment of the goal Nietzsche understands the metaphysical task of ordering beings as a whole, not merely the announcement of a provisional whither and wherefore.²¹

You see the point, we have lost ... What is the critical thing? Man is the esteeming being. What does he esteem? He esteems values. Now, of all the words in this whole panoply, this whole lexicon of new words, which really dominates American thought and

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ The sentence is left incomplete. He’s referring to the selection of unpublished notes in the Krell translation (see footnote 12 above).

²¹ Heidegger, *Nietzsche I-II*, 157.

which come from Nietzsche, the central one is value. The will to power is a preparation for the establishment of new values.

This I pose as a question: Is there any longer any place in the university where the foundation of values can be studied? We have accepted completely this understanding. Really accepted completely. I think practically everybody uses the word *value*. If we're talking about good and bad. Practically everybody, even those who think they shouldn't. It's an amazing thing, this instinct, because it's an instinct that has come to be in the last forty years. In the 30s in the United States, it was a kind of "in word" among intellectuals. In the 20s not at all. It's only since the Second World War that it has become popular jargon, and I would always think that a change in an important word is connected with a fundamental change in the way we are. Everybody says values are important, you've got to have values. But what do we do about it, what can we do about it, in our education? Anything? Despair about it. There's no science for that. Everybody has to establish his own, so there's a recognition that there's nothing to do about it and there's no ground for them, but the absolute centrality of values ... I don't know if that makes any sense.

There is no doubt that there are very powerfully held values in America today. A very small number. One of them is anti-smoking. But I think they are almost exclusively of the kind, anti-racism, anti-elitism, anti-sexism. By the way, elitism is another word that comes out of the Nietzschean sociology. When you say that people on top are chosen by some almost mysterious religious process – not by hard work, by force, by reason. There's no question that egalitarianism remains an enormously powerful tendency in America, but somehow as taken for granted, as connected with somehow establishing a world in which everybody can have his own values. These values are imposed upon us – it's an extremely strange thing. They are not taught; you don't have to prove that a man, a woman, a human being shouldn't be a sexist, shouldn't be a racist, shouldn't be an elitist. There's no proof of those; that's just our ethos, it seems to me. And beyond that the questions don't belong to the domain of serious study. Somehow we agree about values.

The whole notion of values came from a new philosophical articulation which we don't study any more. That new philosophical articulation leads to a sort of impotence in relation to values. What's characteristic of our times is not immorality. There may be a lot of that, but everybody wants to be moral. Much more so than when I was young. In the 50s the thing was you had to be tough, Machiavellian social science, but now everybody wants to be good, and there is a pervasive soft moralism around. That is one of the greatest impediments to students' learning, in my experience. Unwillingness to accept some of the harder aspects of morality, but at the same time, as I suggested, this sense of groundlessness, and a sense that these are only values, there's nothing we can do about it. How do they go about it in theology school, establishing religious values now? What do they do?

[Interlocutor] "I think there's a remnant ... people who want to defend anti-sexism, anti-racism, isn't there a remnant of some standard of nature that they'd have a recourse to? These people, I don't think they would immediately say there's no way of establishing values. But the ordinary person, and even the ordinary passionate defender of this or that cause, I believe would have recourse to an older standard. They would say, when you look

at the nature of the races, they're essentially alike. Look at men and women, aren't they essentially alike? I think that would be the way in which they would think about this."

I wonder if that's simply true. I mean, there is something of that. There is a sort of simple naturalism in all these things. I think maybe this afternoon it might be desirable to take some of the things on feminism in Nietzsche all together. But I think both things are within feminism. With racism, on the one hand, I think that the standard was traditional Americanism, something like that, all men have certain kinds of natural rights and so on. With feminism, there was that element, but it has moved backward and forward. Because there are a whole series of problems. One is the overwhelming weight of history, which is against feminism. One therefore has to say that history was a mistake. The second thing, of course, is the physical differences in childbearing. So essential to feminist arguments is that in order to preserve the species we had to have this medicine. It's only in the last fifty years that we have medicine that has changed to this degree the survivability of children, that children don't die any more, very rarely die of diseases, whereas 100 years ago, 50 percent still died, or maybe 75. So that meant there had to be many more child bearers if there was going to be preservation. And secondly, the means of preventing conception, which are scientific and obviously somehow a conquest of nature. That movement has greater difficulties to face, so you find both things. One is nature and the other is freedom of choice, which is to say that nature has to be overcome. Both these elements, I think, are there.

We maintain the same goals, but our grounds shift constantly about them. People will be absolute relativists when it comes to questions of international relations, or sexual tastes, and so on, but there'll be relative absolutists, or perhaps absolute absolutists, when it comes to questions of racial, sexual, and general egalitarian rights, and that's what's so curious about our moral condition. I'm not taking a position on any of the particular things. It is the enormous difficulty of coherent grounding. You can say, well, perhaps they were always poorly grounded. But in our time, because there's so much intellectualism around, I do think this has this effect, and I'm very struck by the ease with which people change their positions. That accounts for liberals becoming fascists. I was very struck in my experiences with university students who were always for freedom of speech easily giving in to committed students who wanted to stop freedom of speech. What happened there? They admired the commitment, the strength, whereas they themselves weren't really sure.

I think underlying it – and this is what Nietzsche says, and of course what Nietzsche tries to teach us to live with – is that there is intellectually relativism, but that relativism serves certain kinds of moral needs, which are the egalitarian needs. Nietzsche says these two things were coeval, they happened at the same time. Relativism, which means you couldn't believe in anything, in various forms, and Nietzsche of course accepts that relativism. At the same time, the last man with the goals of the welfare state as a kind of absoluteness, but you can say that in a way that absoluteness can only come from relativism, because nobody would choose that if they have real values. Something of that kind. It's a kind of end of man, comfortableness of man, and that is a very powerful instinct, and relativism which destroys all other values as its instrument, the instrument of relativism. Maybe Nietzsche is wrong about what is the articulation of nature and so on, but I don't really see nature. There's a lot of talk about nature, but what they mean

by nature is not what Nietzsche meant by nature or what Plato meant by nature. What is meant by nature is dead nature without man, and which sends very little, and the very characteristic of the relationship to nature is not only dead but contempt for man. You can see on practically every one of those PBS shows about nature. This was before man came and polluted. Porpoises are nice people, they don't do what man does, they don't have wars, and they don't invent smokestacks; this is [a] continuing rhetoric throughout the entire thing, a denigration of man, a denigration of reason, but on the level of mere feeling because our relation to nature – nature is good because we feel good in nature, it's a kind of end of man. There are many sensible elements in the ecological movement.

Lecture delivered by Allan Bloom at Boston College in 1983 for a series titled "Philosophic Perspectives." The series was intended to help teachers of undergraduates in their teaching of thinkers essential to liberal education and addressed the decline of liberal learning at American universities. The remaining lectures delivered by Bloom were on Socrates, Aristotle, and Machiavelli.